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Lodge-Harkins Showdown Looms

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 16 —A

sudden convocation of top Kennedy administration officials in Honolulu next Wednesday almost certainly has as its main purpose a showdown between Henry Cabot Lodge II and Gen. Paul D. Harkins, the U.S. ambassador and top military commander in Viet Nam.

The key facts are that Lodge, a Republican, was sent to Viet Nam two months ago because of increasing Kennedy disenchantment with the Vietnamese regime headed by Ngo Dinh Diem. Since then, Diem was overthrown. Lodge was both in on the deal and pleased by it, and Harkins was definitely caught napping.

Lodge, Harkins and Adm. Harry D. Felt, commander of all U.S. forces in the Pacific, are the only ones named as coming from Viet Nam to the impending conference. But from Washington, there will be Dean Rusk and Robert S. McNamara, respectively secretaries of state and defense; Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and McGeorge Bundy, a top White House troubleshooter.

NATIVE leaders of the revolt have said that Harkins was not tipped off concerning the coup for the reason that he had been the leading exponent of a doctrine of "sink or swim with Diem."

As reported from Viet Nam by a New York Times correspondent, plainly on good terms with Lodge, Gen. Harkins was warned of the impending revolt by subordinate American officers, but refused to believe their reports.

Said the Times dispatch:

"On the morning of the attack, Gen. Harkins told Adm. Felt that there was no chance of the coup but he felt they were exaggerated. Adm. Felt felt for

Hawaii just about the time the coup began."

Meanwhile, both Ambassador Lodge and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had warned the White House that the coup was imminent.

Said the New York Times correspondent:

"These sources say that several days before the coup, Gen. Harkins told Ambassador Lodge that there would not be a coup."

Gen. Harkins issued a statement last Tuesday that "this headquarter was aware of certain troop movements and dispositions on the morning of Nov. 1, but cover plans had been so well conceived and implemented that the imminence of a coup d'etat was not apparent."

A CORRESPONDENT in Saigon of The London Economist, meanwhile, has offered these observations:

"The fate of unhappy President Diem and his evil influence, Ngo Dinh Nhu, was probably inevitable, and the good that Diem did eight years ago will doubtless be buried with him."

"That the United States did not actually take part in the coup is academic. The point is that, once the top Viet Nam military brass was at last convinced that Washington would not intervene on Diem's side, they overthrew his regime with almost contemptuous ease."

"The elaborate security network in which Nhu had enmeshed his bureaucracy and the army command, the personal rivalries and distrust that had been encouraged, could not prevent or impede a coup that was approved and plotted by at least 14 military officers and had been acclaimed in city, village and farm without a murmur of

discontent.

"Nhu himself said, 'Coups are like eggs and must be smashed before they are hatched.' The shell of this smoothly laid egg was far tougher than the cement bunkers, heavy tanks and stout walls of the presidential palace."

CERTAIN TO be reviewed in Honolulu are the changes in policy inaugurated by the Kennedy administration.

Under President Eisenhower,

the prime policy was U.S. help, plenty of it, cash, military equipment and a few technical advisers — but with no Americans fighting except as they might be caught by a Communist attack.

President Kennedy changed that system, beginning with only helicopter pilots and gradually increasing fighting personnel until Americans recently have been reported in virtually every casualty list — at least 300 of them killed.

More and more also, Gen. Harkins has been calling the shots, with names of Vietnamese generals rarely reported.

Quite a few Americans on the spot are known to feel strongly that the Eisenhower policy was better and that, particularly on the heels of Diem's overthrow,

Americans should at least disappear from sight among the

military, and let the Vietnamese run the war.

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